



AAC Publications

The Towers of Simiatug

Ecuador, Andes

From December 5–9, a crew from Fondo Acceso Andino (the Ecuadorian analog to the Access Fund in the U.S.) went to explore a new area: the Towers of Simiatug. For rock climbing in Ecuador, this is a discovery of the decade.

The volcanic Towers of Simiatug were first illuminated to the Ecuadorian climbing community in 2015 by friends of ours who were researching landscapes on Google Earth and who then did reconnaissance on foot. Three years passed until a proper trip came together. The primarily Ecuadorian team included Javier Arizaga, Edgar Aulestia, Keith Brett (USA), Fernando Davila, Juan Carlos Merlo, Santiago Perez, Jorge Proaño, and myself.

Simiatug is a region in the Bolivar province, just northwest of Chimborazo (6,263m), and is home to the Kichwa people, who are ethnic descendants of the Incans; the population in the region is 99 percent indigenous. Simiatug means the “mouth of the wolf” in the local Kichwa language. For logistics, the indigenous community of Cocha Colorada are welcoming and can provide a meal as well mules and llamas to shuttle gear to the towers; it’s a two-hour hike to reach the boulder field base camp (1°20’46.52”S, 78°57’45”W).

This is a high-elevation climbing area, with a base camp at 4,200m amid rocky, short-grass tundra typical of Ecuador’s páramo zones. The rock formations consist of andesite and basalt towers with walls up to 150–200 meters tall that are mostly north- to east-facing. This is a perfect scenario for multi-pitch traditional climbing at altitude. There is also significant potential for single-pitch crack climbs and very aesthetic highball bouldering near the base camp. The best season is probably September–January.

Over three full days of climbing, our group established five new routes in ground-up style. Three of these routes reached the summit of the northwesternmost and most prominent tower in the group, Warmi Torre (Warmi means “woman” in Kichwa). The longest of these routes is Warmi Torre Direct (4 pitches, 5.10+) up the northeast aspect; a two-pitch variation beginning midway up this route climbs up the adjacent ridge on climber’s right to reach the summit (5.7 choss). Our third route on Warmi Torre, Strange and Eternal (3 pitches, 5.10), is located left of the previous routes on the east wall. It is likely the most continuous crack system in our country and follows an obvious vertical line to the summit of Warmi Torre.

Left of Warmi Torre are the two Apu Machay Towers. On the easternmost of these two towers, we climbed the route ¡Asi mismo es esto Griffin! (3 pitches, 5.10+). A (for now) single-pitch route, Reina de Simiatug (5.10+), ascends the obvious hand crack on Anfiteatro Wall, which is a columnar wall below and left of the previous route.

There are two other formations across the basin, east of these routes, that locals call Hatun Urku and Kari Torre. We returned over a number of weekends in January 2019 to attempt these formations and other shorter routes. On Hatun Urko, we climbed a pair of routes: Inti Ñan (“Sun Path,” 3 pitches, 5.11+), on the left side of the main wall, and Llantu Ñan (“Shadow Path,” 2 pitches, 5.10+), on the right side. On Kari Torre, we have established four pitches (to 5.11 A2) but are still one pitch shy of the summit.

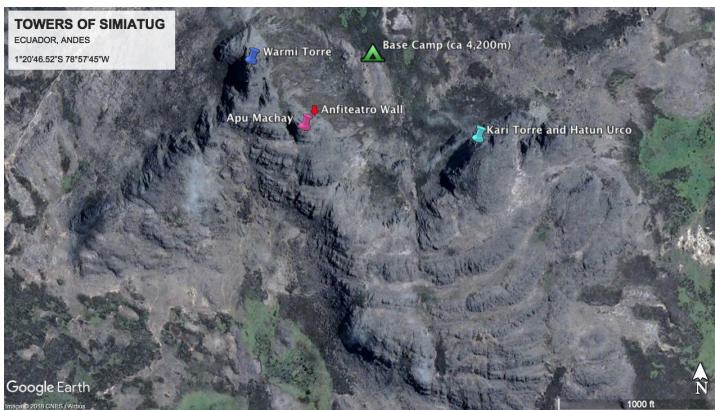
We left bolts and pitons for anchors on the routes we climbed and also established a common rappel line down Warmi Torre to facilitate an easy descent to base camp.

–Felipe Proaño, Ecuador

Images



An overview of the Towers of Simiatug from base camp, showing from left to right: Hatun Urco and Kari Torre (no routes as of December 2018), Anfiteatro Wall and the route Reina de Simiatug (purple line), Apu Machay and the route ¡Asi mismo es esto Griffin! (orange line), and Warmi Torre with the routes Strange and Eternal (red line), Warmi Torre Direct (blue line) and variation (green line).



Overview map of the Towers of Simiatug (1°20'46.52"S, 78°57'45"W).



Anfiteatro Wall and the route Reina de Simiatug (purple line), Apu Machay and the route ¡Asi mismo es esto Griffin! (orange line).



The columnar basalt Anfiteatro Wall.



Warmi Torre, showing Strange and Eternal (3 pitches, 5.10) in red and the route Warmi Torre Direct (4 pitches, 5.10+) in blue. The descent line is marked in yellow.



Warmi Torre, showing Strange and Eternal (3 pitches, 5.10). Felipe Proaño writes, "It is likely the most continuous crack system in our country."



Karri Torre



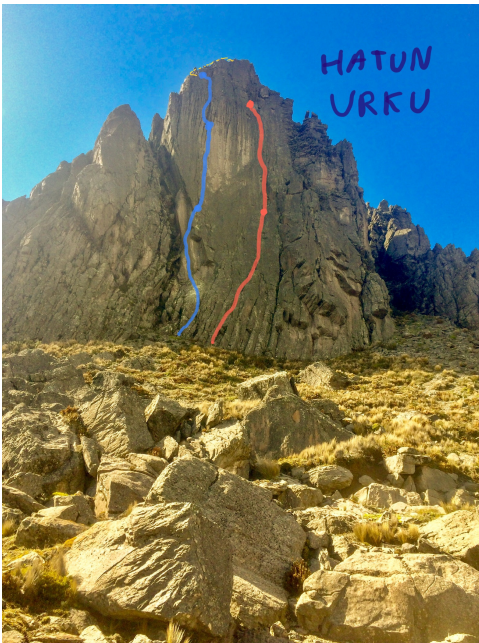
Climbers on Strange and Eternal (3 pitches, 5.10).



Warmi Torre from the approach.



The Towers of Simiatug



Hatun Urku, showing Inti Ñan ("Sun Path," 3 pitches, 5.11+) in blue, and Llantu Ñan ("Shadow Path," 2 pitches, 5.10+) in red.



Kari Torre, showing the one partially established route (as of January 2019): 5.11 A2 (blue) and 5.10 A1 (red).

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